

Cathedral church

"Sveto Uspenie Bogorodichno"



Varna

His Eminence
Kiril, Bishop of
Varna and Veliki Preslav
Blessing the people



Cathedral church

"Sveto Uspenie Bogoroditschno"

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary





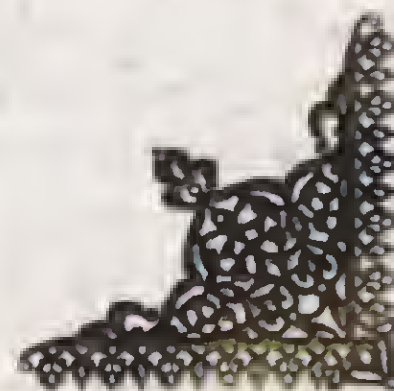
The Orthodox Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been dominating the landscape of Varna for over a century. The Cathedral, as Varna citizens call it, is both the symbol of the faith and the hallmark of the Bulgarian "sea capital". The church has been the first monument erected to commemorate and pay tribute to the Russian and all other soldiers who perished for the Liberation of Bulgaria during the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878).



After the fall of Bulgaria under the Ottoman Empire (the end of the 14th century), many of the Orthodox churches in Varna were destroyed or turned into mosques. During that period Varna was part of the Greek patriarchate, and was a bishop's town with a Greek bishop.

The Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, founded in 1602, has been the oldest working church to have been preserved in Varna. In the middle of the 19th century, and especially after the Crimean War, a lot of Bulgarians settled to live in Varna. They soon acquired wealth and began to oppose the town's hellenization.

On 11 May 1860 an Orthodox religious municipality was established in Varna, and in August of the same year a Bulgarian school was founded. At the end of 1860, when the Bulgarian population of Varna declared they no longer acknowledged the Greek church authority, they looked for an opportunity to build a church whose services would be performed by Bulgarian priests. Alexander





Rachinski, the then Russian Vice-Consul in Varna, supported the demands for introduction of the Bulgarian language into church services.

On 14 February 1865 the Bulgarian church was founded and a divine liturgy was held by priests Konstantin Dunovski and Ivan Gromov. The church was dedicated to St. Archangel Michael.

In 1871 the Bulgarian Exarchate was established in Constantinople. Through their representatives the Bulgarian population of Varna requested that their town became the seat of a Bulgarian bishop and that it was included within the Bulgarian Exarchate. Archimandrite Simeon became Varna and Preslav Bishop.

Shumen was the seat of Bishop Simeon before the Liberation, and after the Liberation his seat was moved to Varna. In the wake of the Liberation, the Bulgarian population of Varna had no independent church of their own. The welcoming ceremony in honour of the Russian soldiers was held at the building which housed both the Bulgarian school and the St. Archangel Michael Church. There was a pressing need of a new representative church building. This initiative was greatly supported by Count Dondukov-Korsakov, the commissioner of the Russian Emperor to Varna, who said that the Bulgarian population of Varna deserved to have the most magnificent Orthodox church in Bulgaria. The Prince expressed the readiness of the Russian Empire and of Russian charity organizations to help the construction of such a church.

At a time when the foundations of the new Bulgarian State were being laid, and the structures of state authority were being set up, the town leaders realized it was vital that the





church authority was reinstated as well. A special committee in charge of the construction of the cathedral was appointed.

The minutes of its first meeting read as follows: ***“Upon the advice and with the encouragement of His Grace Simeon, Varna and Preslav Bishop, on this eighth day of November in the year 1879 a meeting of Varna citizens was held at the school above the old Bulgarian***

church with the aim of considering the construction of a new Bulgarian church to meet the demands of the town of Varna, as well as the construction of a building to accommodate the Secondary School. A committee of 8 members was elected, comprising: H. G. Simeon, Varna and Preslav Bishop, Chairman; members - Velichko Hristov, Perikli Havezov, Yanaki Zhekov, Anton Nedyalkov, Sava Markov, Gancho Nenov, and Hristo Neykov. The purpose of this committee is to collect donations for the construction of a church and a school.”

On 4 December 1879 the committee met and decided that “the church should be erected in the square by the town clock”. This resolution was passed at a general meeting, held on 06 December 1879 at the Bulgarian school, and the Town Council ceded the respective plot for the church construction.

On 02 August 1880 Prince Alexander, head of Principality Bulgaria, paid a visit to Varna.

He was presented the two projects for a church and asked to approve one of them. The first project followed the Peterhof Church in Saint Petersburg, and the second one had been elabo-



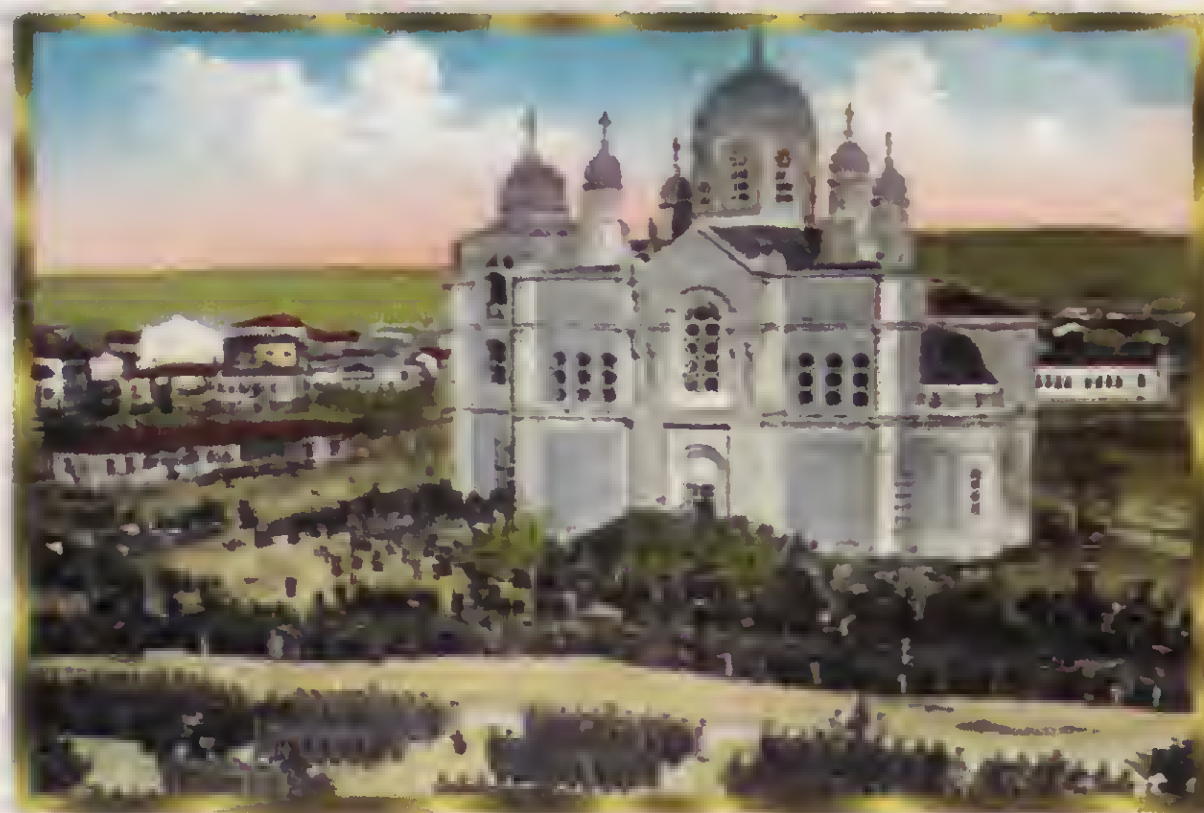


rated by architect P. Kuppa. The King approved the Peterhof Church as a model, but he recommended that the new church be built on the empty site between the then barracks and the town's new part, which was more spacious and the church could be seen from all directions.

By choosing the location of the future cathedral church of Varna, Prince Alexander Battenberg gave a new direction to the future architectural appearance and development of the town. His choice plainly stated that Varna would be dominated by the Bulgarian national spirit.

Prince Battenberg expressed his wish to lay the foundation stone of the building. On 22 August 1880 after a public prayer, with the blessing of Bishop Simeon, and in the presence of many Bulgarian and Armenian residents of Varna, Prince Battenberg turned the first sod of the church with a silver spade and hoe, specially manufactured for this occasion.

The minutes of the event read as follows:
"On this 22nd day of August in the year 1880, His Highness the Bulgarian Prince Alexander I deigned to come to the site assigned for the construction of the church, whereby in the presence of His Grace Simeon, Varna and Preslav Bishop, the members of the committee, the District Governor, the



Town Mayor and a large number of citizens, and after the public prayer held by His Grace and the local clergy, His Highness the Bulgarian Prince Alexander I laid the foundation stone of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whereupon the following Act was drawn up and undersigned by His Highness the Prince: "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, on this



To accumulate funds, a special lottery was run of 150,000 tickets of 2 Leva each, that were sold in Bulgaria and abroad. The total sum of the construction of the church amounted to 324, 524.88 Bulg. Leva, according to the committee report published in 1887.

Many renowned Bulgarian master-masons took part in the construction of the church. Varna master-builder Yanko Kostandi took the most active part in this process. In May 1884 the committee signed a contract with Gencho Kunchev of Tryavna, who was a renowned church-builder, and who was commissioned to complete the construction of the cathedral. At the end of October 1885 the church was finally completed.

The building materials were of local origin. The ashlar were taken from an ancient fortification wall.

The stones for the church facade were quarried from the region of the villages of Lyuben Karavelovo and Kumanovo. The internal columns were made of hard stone from the Tashli Tepe area to the north-east of Varna. The outer columns under the windows were made of stone quarried in Ruse. The vaults were made of freestone. The stones were lifted with two hoists imported from England. The roof and the cupolas were coated in copper sheets.



On 03 August 1886 the committee stated that in general the construction of the church had been completed. This is what has been written about the first divine service: ***“On this 30th day of August in the year 1886 the first divine service was held at the newly-constructed Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was attended by a large number of citizens.”***



After the completion of the construction work, the church board of trustees exerted great efforts for its furnishing and mural-painting. On 13 July 1886 the church committee, together with representatives of all guilds, decided to commission from one Russian icon-painting workshop all church icons - "St. St. Cyril and Methodius", "St. Archangel Michael", "St. Pantelei", "Jesus Christ", "St. Andrew", "The Virgin Mary", "St. John the





Precursor", "St. Euthymius", "St. Joseph", "St. Ilias", "St. Athanasius", "The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin", "St. John of Rila", "Life-giving Source", "St. Spiridon", St. Alexander Nevski", "St. George". It took over fifty years for the internal decoration and the furnishing to be completed.

The iconostasis and the bishop's throne have been carved by Filip and Vasil Filipov, the chandeliers - by master-woodcarver Petur Kushlev, the church pews - by master Niko Mavrodi, and the pulpit - by Kuzman Blazhenov, his son Makariy, and Nestor Trayanov. The floor was tiled in 1911, and the gallery was built in 1915.



At the end of January 1890 the church board of trustees decided "instead of having a special tower built, that would cost another 30,000 Leva, to have the dome raised so that the bell chimes could be heard throughout the whole town of Varna." Today's tower was built between 1941-1943.

Special tribute has been paid to the Russian liberators in the gilded inscription above the altar which says, "St. Nicholas, patron-saint of the pious Russian Tsar Nikolai Alexander". The church was consecrated on 27 October 1919 by Varna and Preslav Bishop Simeon, Branitski Bishop Kliment and Levkian Bishop Varlaam.



The overall mural-painting of the church, which began in 1949, was performed by prof. Nikolai Rostovtsev, Karlo Yordanov, Gospodin Georgiev, and decorators Dinko Shishkov and Alexander Sorokin.

The mural paintings in the narthex were done fee-free by Nikolai Rostovtsev as a donation to the church.

In the 60-ies of the 20th century the stained windows were glazed, with St. St. Cyril and Methodius depicted on the large southern windows facing the square, and St. Kliment and St. Angelarius on the northern windows.





In the period between 1999-2002, under His Grace Cyril, the Varna and Preslav Bishop, the domes and the roof were coated with gold- and silver-containing materials, and a ventilation system was installed.

The new candle-holders of wood and metal were worked out by master Alexander Nikolaev. The murals on the central dome were also restored by a team of painters headed by Toni Tsaneva, and Archpriest Vladimir Atanasov and Deacon Aleko Rachev carried out the overall restoration of the murals in the church.

The grandeur of the Varna Cathedral has been enhanced by the unique exterior lighting installed in 2001 with municipal funds. A daily Holy Divine Liturgy has been held in the Cathedral ever since August 1886. Thousands of Christians have been receiving God's blessing by choosing to be baptized or wedded in this sanctuary. During the church services, visitors can enjoy the magnificent chants performed by Varna's oldest church-choir

A prayer is an offering of one's mind and soul to God in the form of a reverential address. Being the expression of one's religious feeling and the communication between man and God, a prayer is part of the Christian divine worship which is reflected in the divine service. The first Christians held their divine services in private homes. When the persecutions of Christians ceased, the erection of church buildings became a necessity.

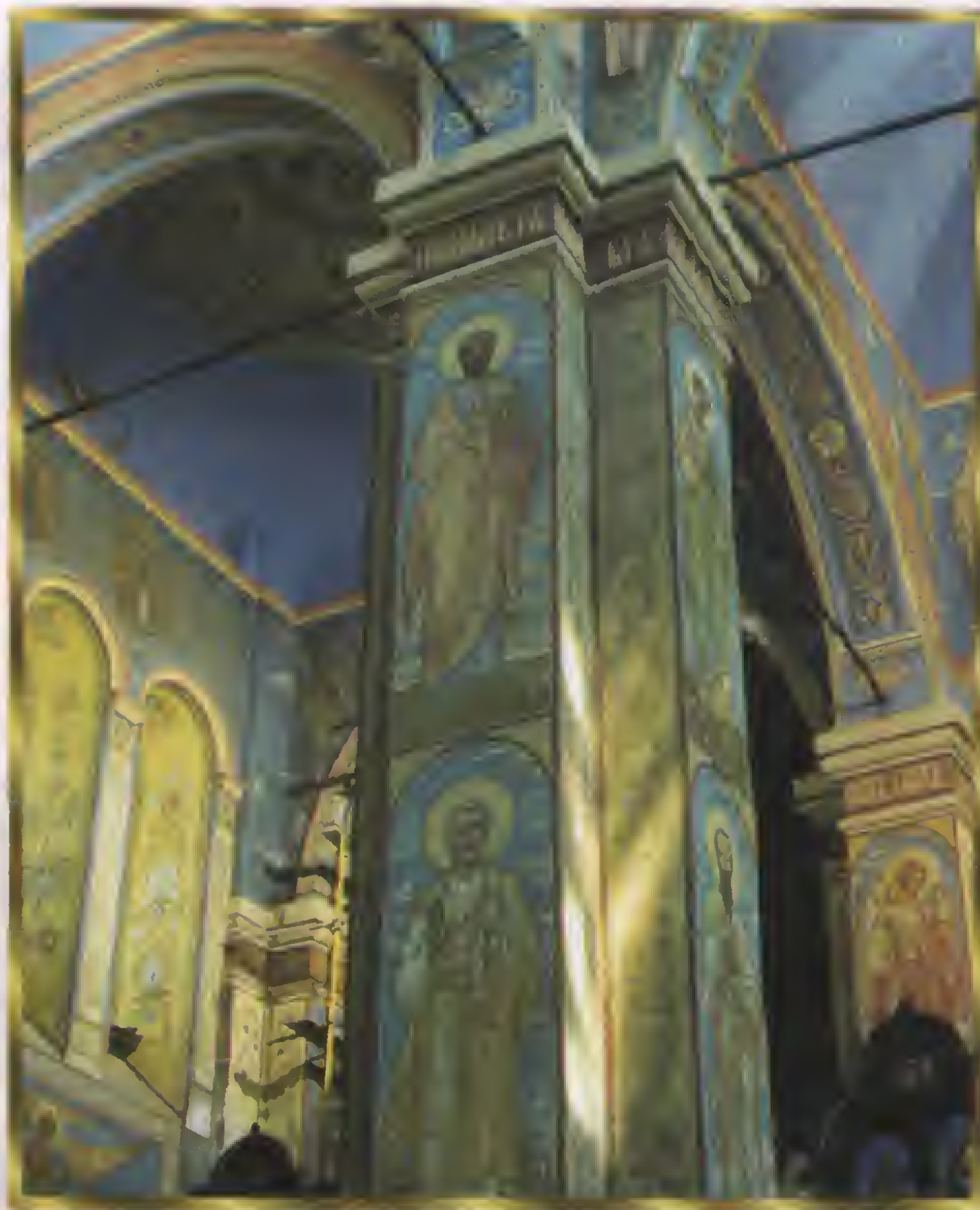




A view of the church

The basilica is the oldest type of Christian church. Later, parallel to basilicas, round-shaped or multiangular domed churches, called rotundas, were built.

The architectural fusion between a basilica and a rotunda gave birth to a new type of church - the domed basilica.



Colonnade

Later the cross-domed basilicas appeared.
As time passed by, three-apsed and five-apsed churches with
colonnades were built.



Dome



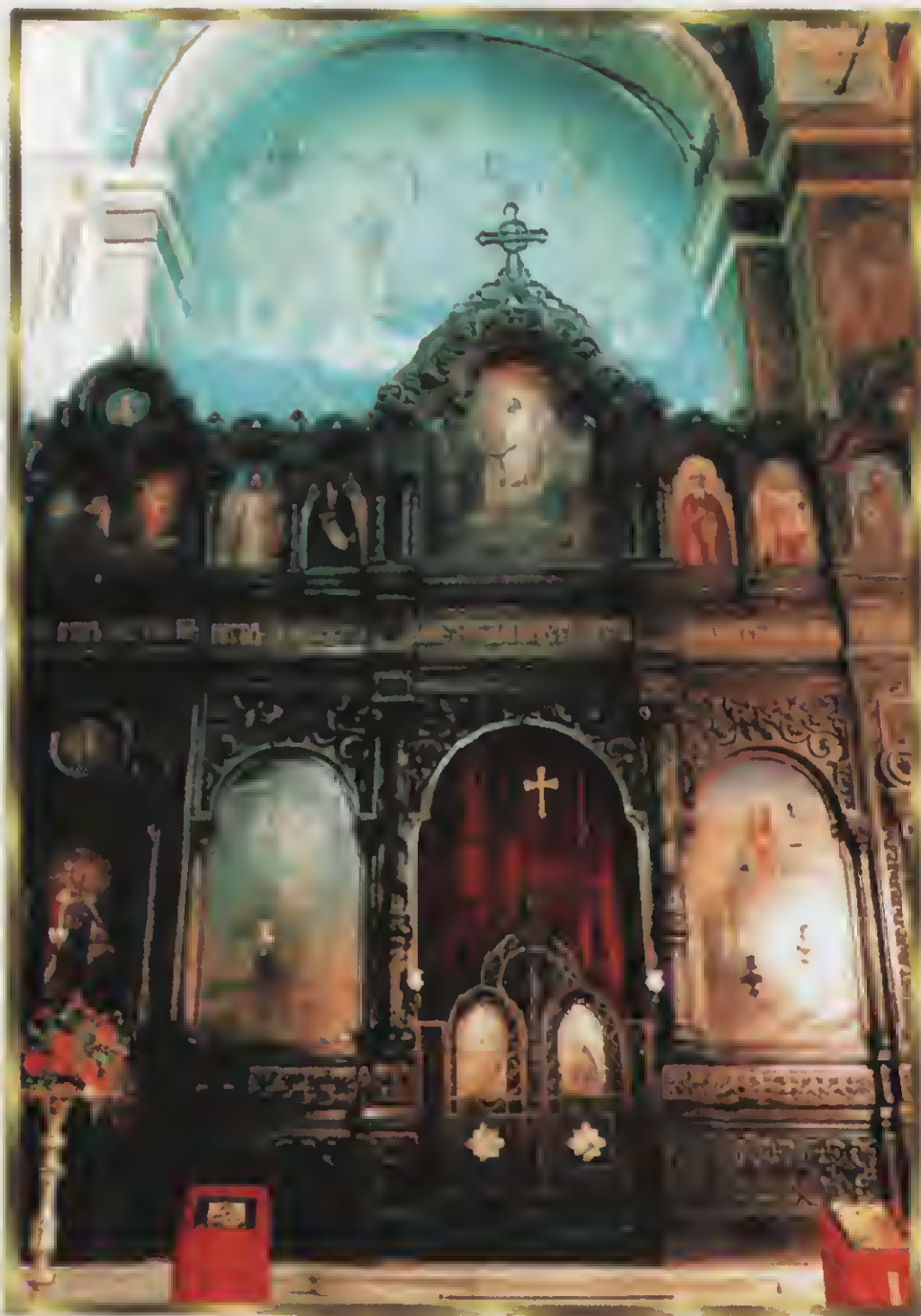
The narthex

There is a dome above the intersection point of the naves.
There are single-, three-, or five-domed churches.

The Varna Cathedral of the Assumption is a three-naved cross-domed basilica. It has been designed as a modern Orthodox church consisting of three parts - a narthex, a central part, and an altar.







The iconostasis of the northern altar

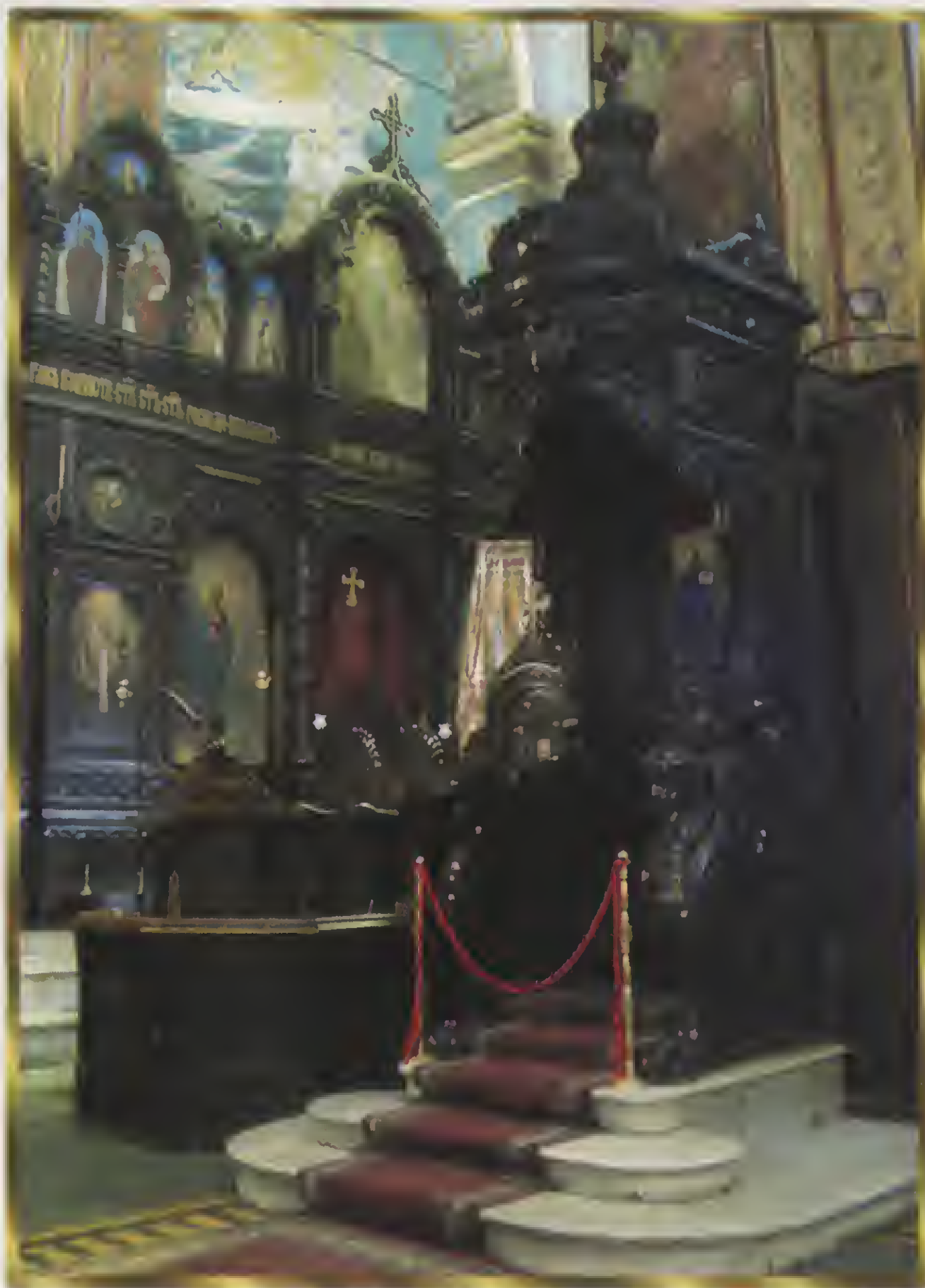


The iconostasis of the southern altar

A narthex is a round or multiangular vestibule. In olden times the unbaptized people had to withdraw to the narthex at some point of the liturgy. Now it accommodates some auxiliary premises, like a small shop for candles, icons, and other small articles. With the introduction of church-bells, church-towers were built in one of the corners of the narthex, near it or above it.

The central part of the church is rectangular, with five domes, divided by colonnades into three naves. It accommodates the pulpit, the bishop's throne, the psalm-readers' place, and the iconostasis. The pulpit is an elevated platform used in preaching or conducting a worship service. It is located on the left side near the iconostasis of the central nave.





The bishop's throne is located on the right side, opposite the pulpit. The psalm-readers' place is also called kliros, since before being ordained as readers or singers, the applicants first had to have their hair cut like "clerics".

They are located opposite each other on both sides of the central nave, near the bishop's throne and the pulpit.



The iconostasis is a screen separating the altar from the central part. Every altar has three doors. The middle door, called the Holy Gates, has two wings. The southern door and the northern door are single-winged. The icon of Jesus Christ is to the right of the Holy Gates, and the icon of the Blessed Virgin is to the left. Next to the icon of the Virgin Mary comes the icon of the event or the saint to which the church has been dedicated. The icon of the Last Supper is placed above the Holy Gates. The iconostasis is crowned with a cross, which is the symbol and triumphal sign of man's salvation.



Part of the central altar - the table

The altar is the most sacred part of a Christian church. It is always located in the eastern part towards the rising sun which symbolizes the sun of truth, i.e. Christ, to whom the believers offer their prayers in their hearts. It is located behind the iconostasis and is raised above the other two church parts. It accommodates a table on which the eucharistic elements are consecrated. It also contains an upper communion table, and a place for offerings.



A mural painting of the Holy Spirit, central nave, dome



*Part of the
murals on the
northern altar*



*Part of the
murals on the
southern altar*

***The Nativity
of Christ
(northern nave)***



***The birth of
the Virgin Mary
(southern nave)***





Mural painting



Mural painting

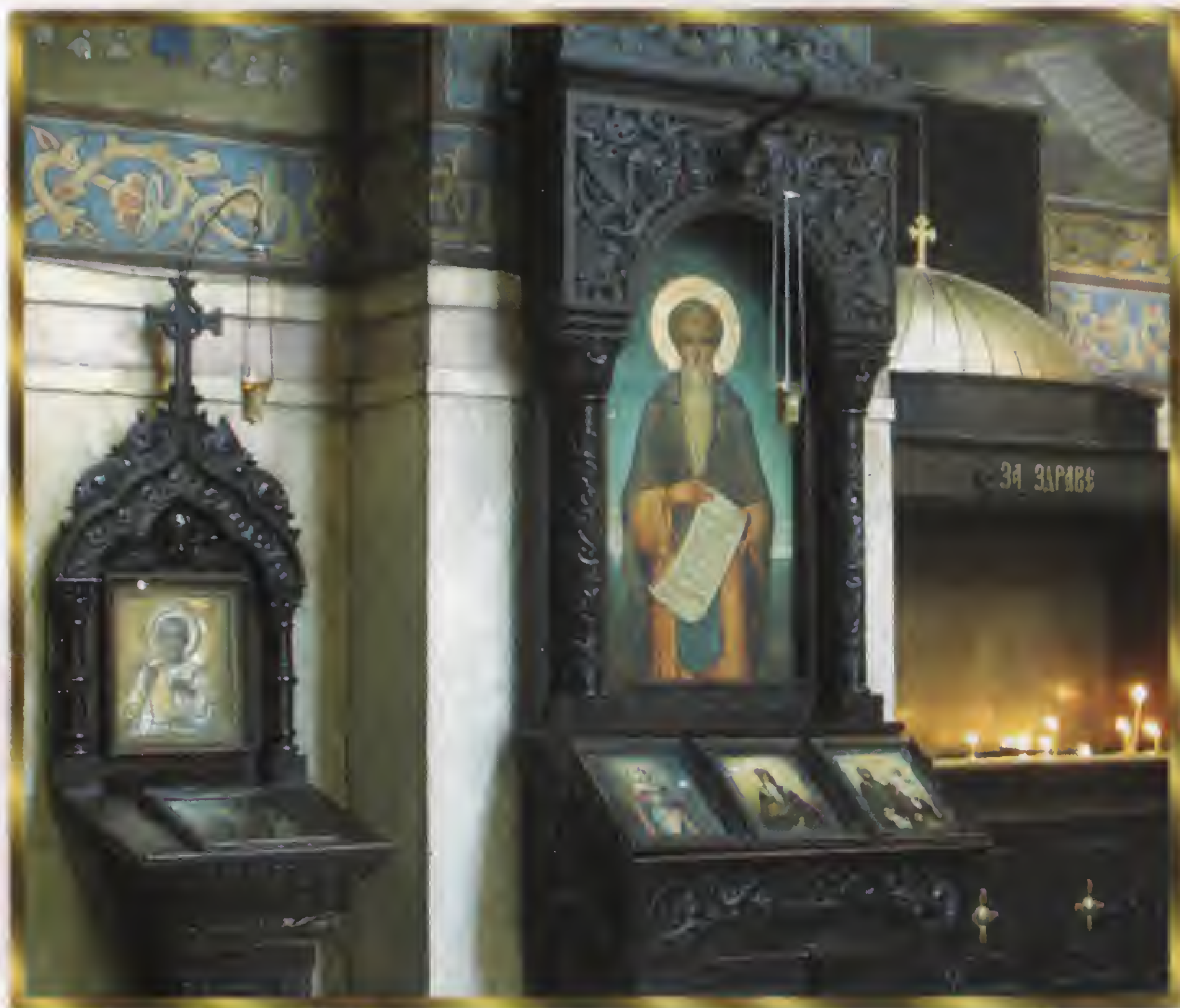
Mural painting



Mural painting







A view of the church



The Holy Gates - the central iconostasis



Mural painting - the central iconostasis



The entrance - the central arch

The art of Orthodox mural-painting and iconography was first developed in the Byzantine churches from which it was transferred and followed by all peoples who adopted Christianity.

The aim of Orthodox iconography is not to glorify the human body with anatomical precision, but rather to present the images with the loftiness of the spiritual values for which the most pious and virtuous Christians have been distinguished.



The entrance - the central arch



Holy Sacrament - baptism



Holy Sacrament - wedding

Cathedral Church "Sveto Uspenie Bogorodichno"

By buying this book, you are contributing to the restoration of the icons and murals as well as the maintenance of the Cathedral-monument

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